

Section: TERRORISM

^ ELLSBERG ON VIETNAM

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How do you spell Blechman?

ELLSBERG: Blechman. It's Blechman and somebody. It's two authors in International Security on the 1973 War, about I think '82, 1982, around the fall of 1982. OK, now I said all this though to define how important this was, and how dangerous it was seen by the participants. All right, now one last point that comes out from Hersch and Roger Morris. Hersch has a very good account of this whole thing. Though not with all the Blechman material. But Hersch's account is very good. And is...no wait, I'm sorry. Not Hersch. It is Blechman. OK. Let's see, another point. Roger Morris who had worked for Kissinger in this period, revealed the following. First it was publicly known at the time that the President had not participated in this decision either to answer the Russian ultimatum in this fashion, or to go on alert. It was done in the White House situation room by Haig, Kissinger, Colby from the CIA, and Schlesinger from Defense. These were the people involved. The President was not involved. That was known at the time somehow and remarked on a good deal. It's another thing

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by the way that lead to the belief that it couldn't have been a real alert. You know, a serious alert because then the President would surely have been involved. Why wasn't he involved? Because he was drunk. He was drunk actually most evenings after 5:00 or 5:30 according to Roger Morris, starting in 1969. He was an alcoholic. Not generally known because Haig among others and Kissinger have always protected us from this knowledge, till now, and anybody else has. But he had for once a very good reason to be drunk on this occasion, because it was two days after the Saturday night massacre. And he was totally drunk during this period. And as was said at the time, incommunicado. During the meeting in the situation room they tried to communicate with him in his quarters, but Haig reported, you can't...I can't talk to him.

WOMAN'S VOICE: Blotto.

MAN'S VOICE: That's an interesting irony because in Dr. Strangelove, the russian president is the one who is drunk.

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ELLSBERG: During the movie, is that right?

MAN'S VOICE: No, no. Dr. Strangelove.

ELLSBERG: Does he have to be woken up or something?

WOMAN'S VOICE: The President?

MAN'S VOICE: Yes, he is drunk. The Russian president is drunk.

WOMAN'S VOICE: Oh, the Russian is drunk. Wow.

MAN'S VOICE: The Russian is drunk. Ours wasn't drunk.

ELLSBERG: You know, by the way, you know the Russian ambassador in that who is called I think Tolley or something is quite a physical...has a resemblance to Bill Brennan. OK. So, this little episode that we haven't been told about to this day. You know, Kissinger promised that all of the details would be brought out, but it was never revealed. Is a product then, took place in this country. Not...it wasn't only the...the Nixon Administration like others was prepared to go to nuclear war,

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or to risk nuclear war, to prevent Soviet participation in peace arrangements in the Middle East. Just as, by the way, we dropped two bombs on Japan...

MAN'S VOICE: The Nagasaki bomb.

ELLSBERG: Two bombs, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, primarily to keep the Soviets out of peace negotiations in Japan.

MAN'S VOICE: Not just the Nagasaki bomb?

ELLSBERG: No. Hiroshima as well, to get the... Hiroshima was on August 6. The Russians were expected to come in on August 8.

MAN'S VOICE: They came in. Nagasaki was dropped the day after the Russians came in.

ELLSBERG: Well yes, actually. But what I am saying is they knew they were coming in on August 8. The Hiroshima bomb and the Nagasaki...people said, why two bombs? And the answer was they were trying to get the war over with as quickly as

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possible before the soviets could get deeply inter-  
meshed or before they came in at all, so they  
wouldn't be a party to the Japan peace negotiations,  
as they weren't. They weren't in...they weren't  
an occupying party in Japan. There were other  
reasons as well, but this was a very serious...  
OK, we prepared to risk, in the 1980's...I'm  
sorry, '70's, this risk took the form, the only  
form it could take plausibly. And that was a  
risk, a...starting a process which we knew could  
go out of control. You can't plausibly say, if  
you go in, we'll hit you with nuclear weapons.  
The Russians could only say to that, are you  
kidding? We don't believe you're that crazy.  
But what we did say was, we'll put troops in against  
your troops and we well understand as is true that  
that can go to nuclear war. And that's an impressive  
incredible threat. There is no other basis for  
credibility, so they used it. Why is it...is it  
the case, in fact, that things can get out of  
control? Yes, as I've described here. Haig  
tests some of the ways you know in which you can  
take actions, you learn to take alert actions which  
you yourself, you know, Secretary of Defense, as  
is demonstrated here, doesn't know exactly what is



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being done. Some of those, as Haig says, can be extremely ominous to the soviets. Lead to soviet counteractions to which we react, etc., etc. The process can get out of control. Who at any given moment is in control? Not the president. In the two instances he's describing the president wasn't part of it, for good or bad. Reagan was in the hospital and Nixon was drunk. Who is in control? Haig. Who is Haig? Read this. And find out who Haig is, who is in control. And who deputized people like Haig you know, at various times. The President. For various reasons so they don't escape responsibility either. The situation is dangerous. We have men threaten loss of control in order to gain control. That's the rational side of it. The degree of lack of control that's built into this has its rational adult calculating aspect. It's the only way to make the other guy back down. Consciously Haig also sees that as a necessary part of <sup>state</sup>~~space~~ craft. "I was convinced the Soviet Union did not want war, but where the U.S. was soft or inconsistent or ambiguous in its policies the soviets were increasingly willing to take risks. We had to change that pattern of cause and effect. Meaning by confronting them with bigger

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risks than they were willing to take. How do you make those risks credible? They have to be real. There is a reality that there are risks, the situation can get out of our control and we're willing to take action that will lead to a loss of control if responded to."

MAN'S VOICE: Raising the ante.

ELLSBERG: Yeah, raising the ante. "No frivolous playground test of manhood was involved here."

[LAUGHTER]

ELLSBERG: Did that thought get in anyone's mind? Haig thought that it might be. So he assures us that it wasn't. Mere confrontation should never be the aim of our policy. The aim was of course opening a realistic dialogue with Moscow. The success of that can be judged I think by all of us American citizens at this point.

WOMAN'S VOICE: Signal success.

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ELLSBERG: Of this approach. But that's what he was trying to do. So all of this is rationalized then in terms of instrumental policies of statesmanship. We must take these risks in order to keep the Russians from taking risks themselves. To make them back down. The risks and as you...as implied here, the risks are real. Must we be taking those risks and so forth, the question arises. Let me...we got started late, I'll point out, because so many of you came late. It's your fault.

WOMAN'S VOICE: The blame...the blame is clear.

ELLSBERG: I know want to give the heart of the lecture that I meant to give in five minutes. Can I ask for...can I get a five minute...?

WOMAN'S VOICE: Yes, five minutes.

ELLSBERG: OK, because I know people are starting to...

WOMAN'S VOICE: Yeah, they are trying to go home.

ELLSBERG: OK...



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WOMAN'S VOICE: But you must stop talking.

ELLSBERG: OK. A question that I ask myself as I studied massacres and this course is about massacres, you may have noticed, which is what nuclear war is, was a question, how can people do it? How can the man do it? I've given various explanations for how people find themselves in the chain of command, of such operations. And it is primarily...a massacre is an organized bureaucratized chain of command matter in most circumstances. And I'm saying it's the psychology of such things that really define most of the phenomena. However, there are two aspects, two ends of the scale that are a little hard to explain that way. One is the Calley or Burnhardt end of the MyLai Massacre scale. The person who actually has to pull the trigger. How can they do it? They are face-to-face. This is what people do find perplexing, more than they can find...more than it is hard to understand a bomber who bombs through clouds, and doesn't even see who he is bombing. How can you do what is commonly done in El Salvador or in, was in Cambodia and Lebanon and other places, dash a child's head against a wall. If you are ordered

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to do it, how can you do it? The answer that these people are extraordinary sadists who do this is wrong. They are clearly random...random samples of soldiers who are given a job and told to do it and they do it. How can...I puzzled for a long time about how it is possible for a human to do that? Spear...the old story about the Cossacks spearing babies on their bayonets, is no myth, or the Huns or something. Babies are speared on bayonets in the world we live in. And of course, women. This is a very conjectural answer, but I'm going to tie it in just a few minutes to several things. This is all very speculative, now, and psychological. It's for you to chew on as psychologists and psychiatrists. OK. To make that possible at all, even in the rage...generally it is a response to rage. I'm sorry, not in a rage, but in a response to humiliation and loss, as in MyLai, where the troops had lost people, and they whipped up to avenge their dead comrades who had been killed, by setting, supposedly setting mines and others... Most of these circumstances it is described as avengence for a humiliation. Remember that Sabra and Shattila?

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WOMAN'S VOICE: Oh yes. Oh yes.

ELLSBERG: It was revenge for the death of  
Plashir. \_\_\_\_\_ And that's true in  
most of these circumstances, that the rationale  
is one of vengeance. To avenge oneself in this  
fashion against weak people, unarmed people,  
specifically women and children, it seemed  
to me must call for a...a reversion, one must  
draw on sources of rage and humiliation, feelings  
of humiliation and rage and vengeance that go  
pretty far back. One...I conjecture, this is  
all conjecture now, go back further than the  
experience of adolescence, let's say.

WOMAN'S VOICE: Or even the Oedipal period  
shall we say?

ELLSBERG: Or even the Oedipal period. For such  
titanic aggression, annihilating aggression, one  
could conjecture that it might have its origins  
in the very earliest experiences of rage, vengeance  
and humiliation. And who...in the cause of such  
humiliation at that period...

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WOMAN'S VOICE: No, no, no, no, no.

ELLSBERG: Not fathers? But mothers? And siblings...?

WOMAN'S VOICE: The last is true.

ELLSBERG: All right. Other children.

WOMAN'S VOICE: I need to ask a question. Who are  
the people who don't spear babies?

WOMAN'S VOICE: Women.

ELLSBERG: Yeah right.

WOMAN'S VOICE: Women. Well, but women are babies  
too.

ELLSBERG: No, that's right.

WOMAN'S VOICE: So what stops them?

WOMAN'S VOICE: At some point along here, not  
tonight, but I want to talk about fear and men's  
fear, juxtaposed against women's non-fear.

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ELLSBERG: Yeah. You know, you're absolutely right for posing that. I'm pointing to something now that is a universal experience for men and women, boys and babies...boys and girls. But if we are talking about a male response to it. So if there's any relation between the phenomena you then have to answer the question, why do little boys grow up in this way?

WOMAN'S VOICE: You sure do.

ELLSBERG: Well, and of course, Carol Gilligan, Carol Gilligan does answer it to some extent in that way.

WOMAN'S VOICE: That's right. That's right.

ELLSBERG: For example, Helen Dinerstein, who...

WOMAN'S VOICE: Dorothy...

ELLSBERG: Dorothy...who does again refer to this experience of the mother as overwhelming power figure, does not address the question, why then do women seem to act differently than men later.



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She does deal...Gilligan does. And so that's another question. But now...that's...the idea then that there could be something that like a method actor, you know recalling in order to cry, thinks back to some earlier experience, An actor studio actor that will evoke that emotion. One could conjecture this kind of willingness to annihilate. I must say that this thought was an early one for me, to suggest. I mean one of the first ones...

WOMAN'S VOICE: Take it back (?)

ELLSBERG: No. No, it's a recent thought. It's a recent thought, but it's new for me to imagine that we as humans or at least boys or males, for whatever reason they develop differently may have, there may be emotional roots to what is an unequivocal behavior pattern which is a willingness to war against children, and against women.

WOMAN'S VOICE: Absolutely.

ELLSBERG: Again, the question does arise, you say why not women too, if they want to \_\_\_\_\_

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MAN'S VOICE: But child abuse \_\_\_\_\_ to  
men. Child abuse of infant is done by women as  
much as by men.

WOMAN'S VOICE: Yeah, that's right. And women  
performed the same on those experiments.

ELLSBERG: So women may have...

MAN'S VOICE: \_\_\_\_\_ at least.

ELLSBERG: It's, maybe there's no connection.  
But if there...there may be something.

MAN'S VOICE: But most of the roots, you're  
not claiming emotional roots are in and of them-  
self sufficient. It has to be combined with this  
whole masculine bureaucracy and organization to  
be dominant and \_\_\_\_\_ and the whole...

ELLSBERG: One other thought...this is...good.  
Lots of discussion. I'm very...this is your  
subject. We brought it to your subject, and the  
more you disagree or chew or whatever or you know  
extrapolate, fine...let's pursue it. But let  
me then leave you, this was \_\_\_\_\_ with the

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other end of it, which is the extreme....the...the phenomena, the person at the other end of the scale, the command structure. The guy who feels, I am in control, I am to be blamed, etc., etc. I said that our aims are invitations to feelings of humiliation, that they are so expansive, so global, so ambitious. And such possible humiliations are frequently experienced in the new data that I...from this...am finding myself thereby as extreme left, reveal to Brechman and others is: Surprise, when these guys face humiliation they are prepared to start a process of nuclear interaction. Initiate nuclear war...but the threats on the whole have been made against people who didn't have nuclear weapons. So in the Middle East case, this is one of the few cases, as in Berlin, where we were ready to take on a nuclear power, if necessary. They'll go that far, to avoid, very precisely, the encirclement of an ally, the Russians were doing the same, remember. They were taking measures to avoid the encirclement of their allies. And for similar reasons we were willing to take risks. So these guys are willing to take such risks. I...it is my inference that...what they are risking for is to avoid humiliation, and I don't

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think I'm going very far. If you look at the memoirs, if you talk to these guys, or you know, say...you will, you will see, fairly explicit the theme, they can't do that to me. They can't get away with it. Which is often referred to as a playground kind of thinking. But the fact is, I found in crisis after crisis I was going through that. When I studied crises, that that was a key element in a number of these places where people are taking nuclear risks. A feeling that they had been let down. Oh, in fact, Kissinger reports, in his account of the crisis, he said, when I realized that the Israelis were continuing to encircle the Third Army, he said, I realized that the soviets must think they had been double-crossed. And therefore it was quite understandable to him that they would be sending troops in there, because it was protection. It was quite the understandable thing to do. When you are being double-crossed by an enemy, you must get in there, and restore, vindicate yourself, your integrity, your autonomy, your dignity, your self-worth by revenge, basically. Or by risking, something that Sagan points out in Terms of the Greeks that really struck me was this. That allied with a theme of revenge that runs through

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all the Greek, Homeric accounts and revenge as a major masculine activity, and the basis of one's honor, is a wild risk-taking, which led in the case of the Peloponesian War to the downfall of Athens, ultimately. Something so close to Vietnam that a friend of mine recently did a Guggenheim comparing the Peloponesian War to Vietnam. Very informative to me. Extreme similarities to the downfall of the Athenian Empire. Well, in the course that I was reading this...Sagan doesn't describe why those two things might go together. Hypothesis for this psychologists in the room also. Maybe, first of all that revenge is normally, and commonly displaced against the weak. The first thing you learn, when you feel the pulses of revenge and rage, is not to express them against the person who has evoked them, the all-powerful mother. But to learn to, as...Gestalt would say, retroflex them, to turn that back against yourself to get control of that rage, to keep yourself under control. To incorporate the mother and the father in that on the one hand. But if anything to displace that rage onto somebody else, anybody but the mother, who you can't afford to destroy,



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and it's too strong. She'll get you back, if you fight out at her too much, and you can't afford to lose her. Displacement of rage is very common.

MAN'S VOICE: And it's always a good example in the Peloponesian War because the civilized Athenians who were the good guys presumably, massacred totally the islands that inhibited their growth, men, women and children, who were a very weak neutral group.

ELLSBERG: Well, on that I was just going to say, revenge is commonly carried out against people weaker, more convenient, people who can't fight back. Humiliation is usually displaced. And the other side is, is that unaccompanied by guilt? This very displacement of rage, the working... the working out of revenge, which is normally on... normally done on people...not the person who actually insulted you, or actually did, but on agents of them who are weaker. Displacement, very easily. Is that unaccompanied by feelings of guilt and shame that you were doing it? That you were playing that role? That could account for acts of recklessness that risk self-destruction, as a way that pays the price simultaneously with

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working out the rage and revenge, which risks your own self-destruction and alleviates the feelings of guilt and responsibility that would normally go with...this ties in although I... just was stream of consciousness when I mentioned earlier that 12:00 High phenomenon. The generals who feel themselves to be vulnerable. Is it not easier to contemplate destroying half the world or as we now know it the whole world with nuclear winter, when you understand that should we be forced to do that, you would go too. Your... your own life is at risk at the same time. I think it is easier actually to contemplate that kind of planning. These are not men who would find it easier to say, we'll wipe everybody out and we will go on to bigger and better.... I can say for example that when I knew I was bringing down the Rand Corporation, my friends with me, I felt...sorry, to give away that point, but when I was possibly destroying my best friends in putting out the Pentagon Papers, and certainly was strongly harming the democratic party and others in the Vietnam War, that was a strong inhibitor. It was a strong potential inhibitor. It didn't inhibit me. But it made it a lot easier for me to do what I did do, to believe

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as I did believe that in any case I was going to go to prison forever. You know, it was too bad that my best friend was going to lose his job, Bobby, as he did, as president of Rand, and others, and I certainly regretted that. But it made it a lot easier to realize that I'm going to go to prison. Had I...had I had reason to believe that I was going to hurt them without myself suffering it would have made it much harder to do. But that's it almost in the small. But in the large here, we find people...some...I sense... we find people behaving in ways which they conceive as rationale statesmanship, which is evident to almost anybody else looking at it as almost un...in its scale unprecedentedly reckless, in that. And it's leading towards self-destruction of them, and destruction of all of us. Extinction. Moreover the assumption on which they are acting do not recommend themselves as highly well, empirically founded, you know and reasonable assumptions. Many aspects of their reasoning are rigid and highly divorced from reality. They don't...they don't reflect learning. Three million people were in Vietnam. I would guess that two million 900 and 90,000 of them learned better lessons than hate learned in Vietnam. That's a stupid

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lesson. The situation is simply stupid. Stupider than he is.

MAN'S VOICE: Are you talking about ...?

MAN'S VOICE: In this type of Greek tragedy the actor assumes that he had to control revenge, but you don't...

ELLSBERG: I think we'd have to conjecture that there are emotional things at work here that go beyond their conscious, their conscious mind. And I think that...we are...we have allowed ourselves as citizens now, to the extent that we have any power, any initiative, and I'm using it fully, and we are collaborating in a situation in which guys like this, correctly hear the accusations that they are acting as in a schoolyard or younger and at least deserve that accusation. And in which I would guess even the fantasies of annihilation which are not simple fantasies, which are embodied in their plans and their preparations are not typical fantasies of 7 year old boys, but they typical human fantasies if Melanie Klein is right at all. I...if you will go back to an earlier period, of real and I...where...where we all



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have experienced a taste of what annihilation, real annihilation means. And of course the five year old retains that, and the 10 year old, and the 40 year old and the 7 year old, and can both act to avoid it and can contemplate imposing it on other people, a role which is, after all has the satisfaction of being in that God-like position, at which...the God-like position of the parent that you depended on when you were an infant. There are, however, different ways of responding to these fears. Very broadly I think it has been suggested, female ways are different than male ways. And even among males.

WOMAN'S VOICE: There are a few.

ELLSBERG: And unfortunately among females. There are different ways of reacting. So next time I would like to get into that question. How can we...how can we transcend some of these, if possible. How can we build on those human patterns and instincts that run contrary to a willingness to annihilate, and a willingness to risk annihilation for all.

THANK YOU.